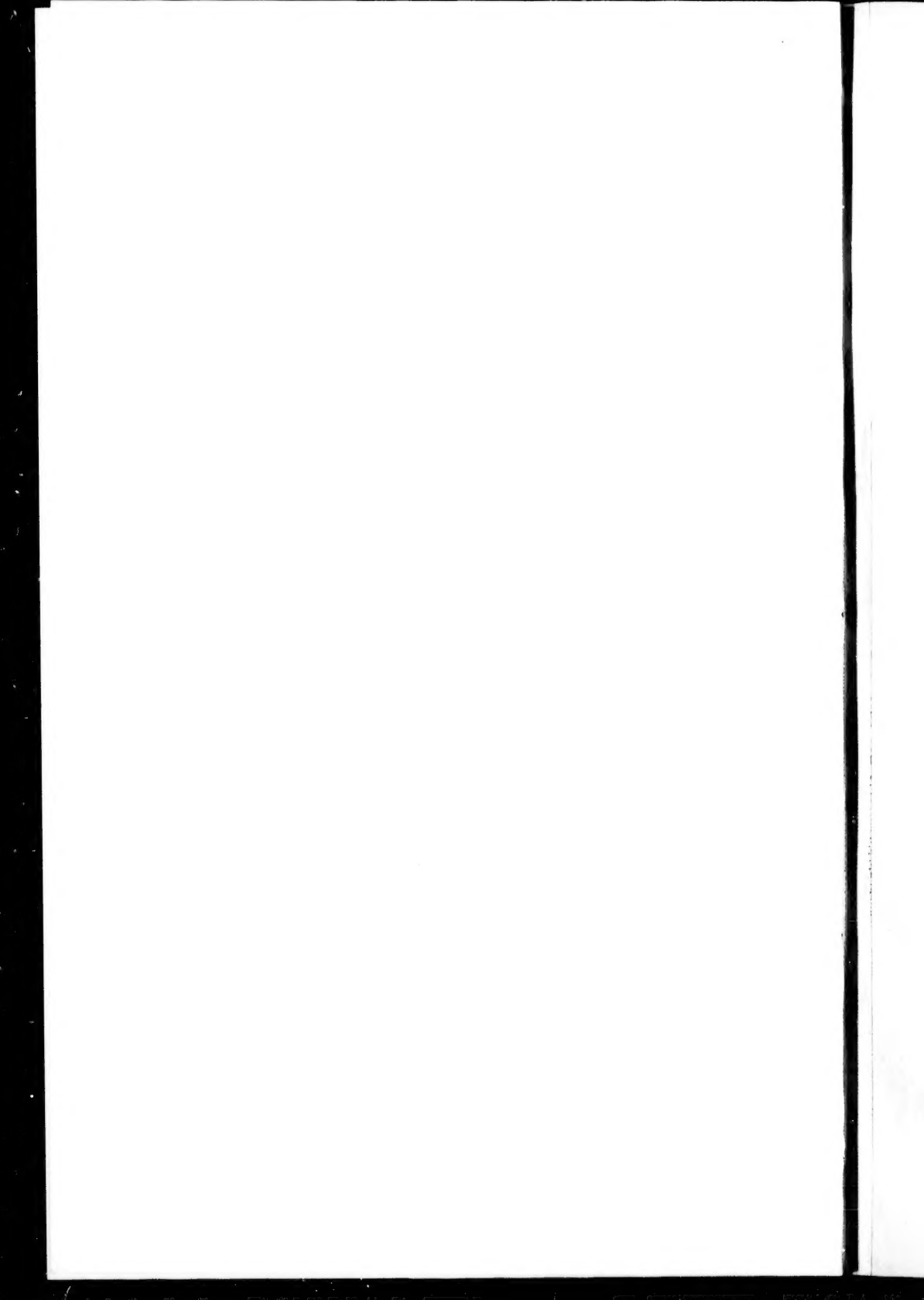




LORD BATEMAN'S PLEA

FOR

LIMITED PROTECTION

OR FOR

RECIPROCITY IN FREE TRADE.

A Letter reprinted from "The Times" of Nov. 12th, 1877.

WITH

A PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

THE following letter is not the result of any sudden impulse, induced by the pressure of the present growing Commercial Crisis, but is based on an earnest and long considered conviction of the truth of the reasoning here attempted to be enunciated.

The absence of statistics may be remarked. Seldom read, more often confusing, never infallible, these are usually the outcome of a contracted vision, and the stale stock-in-trade and never-failing resource of anonymous scribblers, and of heaven-born political economists. They will suggest themselves without difficulty to each manufacturing and exporting interest.

Let this one fact suffice. A simple inspection of the Board of Trade returns will show the alarming deficit in our Exports as compared with our Imports from foreign countries, paying no duty whatever, and which latter unfortunately exceed the former at the rate of upwards of a hundred millions in value per annum !

If the great ship-building interest, all but lost to the Thames and now transferred to the Clyde ; if the great Midland iron and coal trades and of the once prosperous and busy North and West ; if the great railway companies, which depend for their prosperity in a large measure on the carrying trade of these industries ; if the paper makers of Devonshire, the miners of Cornwall, the glass manufacturers, the sugar refiners, the silk and stocking weavers, the great agricultural interest, and last, but not least, the cotton and woollen manufacturers of Lancashire and Yorkshire, are satisfied with the operation of the present and past free trade policy, without reciprocity, and are prepared still to face the free and unrestricted imports of the world at their present enormous disadvantage, this letter will have been written in vain !

But, in the full belief that the exact contrary is the case, and in their interest, and in the interest of those operatives, and of the whole body of the English working classes, more or less dependent upon them for subsistence, the writer has ventured upon the publication of this letter, which is now offered to the calm consideration of the commercial public, with the conviction that he is expressing

herein the sentiments of a vast proportion of the community, who, having hitherto accepted the free trade policy as irrevocable, are now awaking to the conviction that one sided free trade without reciprocity is entirely abortive, and therefore ruinous and disastrous to the best interests of Great Britain.

The question rests in the hands of the constituencies, with whom lies the power, if they have the will, to supply the answer.

BATEMAN.

Shobdon Court, Leominster, Herefordshire, November 24, 1877.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE TIMES."

SIR:—At this moment of widespread commercial depression, the question of the expediency of a return to a system of limited protection as opposed to that of free trade is undoubtedly once again forcing itself upon the consideration of many thoughtful minds.

Notwithstanding the appeals, from the Chancellor of the Exchequer downwards, which continue to be made on its behalf by the advocates and apologists of the free trade policy, it is evident from their recently-expressed opinions that a certain uncomfortable feeling of doubt exists as to its success; and the excuses put forward for the general non-acceptance of the free trade doctrine raise an unmistakable distrust in the soundness of their views, and lead us to inquire whether a policy which requires so much excuse to be made for it, is after all the one best fitted to our peculiar interests, or one in which this country should still continue to persist.

I have used the words "limited protection" advisedly, in order at the outset to guard against any supposition that either myself or those who think with me consider it would be either politic or possible in the impending war of tariffs, or in any revision of our Custom duties, to attempt to impose any restrictions on what I will call vital necessities, or on the recognized food of the population. In any scheme of commercial policy, due consideration should always be given to the capabilities of production of the country on the one hand, and to its absolute necessities on the other.

In the case of Great Britain, owing to our area being so much restricted and to the continual increase in our population, an increase out of all proportion to the size and acreage of the kingdom as compared with the relative proportion of population to the area and extent of foreign countries, it has become virtually imperative upon us to obtain from all nations of the earth the requisite food supply.

Thus far it is willingly conceded that the exercise of free trade, though still incomplete, has conferred on the masses an exceptional and a lasting benefit. I turn aside for a brief instant to pay this tribute to the memory of the late Mr. Cobden and Sir George Cornewall Lewis, and to the foresight of Mr. Bright and Mr. Charles Villiers.

But unfortunately we have to deal with many more interests than those exclusively connected with the food supply of the people. We have to deal with our own natural and sufficient products, with our various home manufactures, and with our own skilled (and daily more expensive) general labor question. These latter, quite as important to the well-being of the community, require to be as jealously guarded and protected, exercising as they undoubtedly do, an equally preponderating influence on the prosperity or otherwise of all classes in the kingdom. It behoves us, therefore, while securing for them the best available market, to be at the same time cautious

how we allow them to deteriorate, or permit rival countries unduly to compete with our native industries to our own loss and detriment.

Sir, we cannot shut our eyes to the universal collapse of trade and its accompanying distress, be it the mineral, the shipping, the carrying, the agricultural, or the general manufacturing trade. Throughout the country the cry of depression and distress and ruin is the same. We have to compete on unequal terms with other foreign countries, who are robbing us of our profits, paying nothing to our exchequer, and underselling us at the same time. When the capitalist finds that his trade is leaving him, and that his profits are reduced to a minimum, it follows that the workmen depending upon him must suffer in like proportion, and, as a consequence, the rate of wages must come down, or employment must cease—strikes, lock-outs, and painful and undeserved distress are the inevitable results. Granted that the theory of free and unrestricted commerce with all quarters of the universe is as bold as it is magnificent; granted that the idea, by whomsoever originated (and advocated by no one more consistently than by our good and wise Prince Consort), is both grand and glorious in its conception; granted that to give effect to it has been the aim as it has been the long-accepted policy of successive Governments; it cannot be denied that the sting of "want of reciprocity" has, from the first, checkmated our philanthropic efforts, and obliged us now to confess, after 30 years of trial, that in practice our free trade is at best but one-sided; and that while we are opening our ports to the commerce and manufactures of the world, free and unrestricted, other countries, without conferring upon us any reciprocal benefit, are taking advantage, without scruple, of our magnanimous, but disastrous (because one-sided), liberality.

It is of no use to blink the question. Facts will speak for themselves. In defiance of all arguments and all persuasion, not to say entreaty, on the subject, these awkward facts still remain. Our overtures to other countries are disregarded; our commercial treaties are not renewed; our own trade is in a sinking and unprofitable condition; our exports show a lamentable, alarming, and increasing deficit; our Exchequer is affected; and, worse than all, not a single country in Europe, beginning with France and Germany and ending with Spain and Switzerland (to say nothing of the United States of America or our own Australian colonies), can be cajoled by the most specious temptation into following our example of free importations, or of opening their ports to the commerce of Great Britain and of the world, unrestricted by safeguards in the shape of duties framed to protect their own native industries.

Now, sir, in view of these undeniable facts, and of the *quasi* admitted failure of the policy which has been so long a time in operation, and which was in fact initiated and I may say necessitated by the exigencies of an exceptional period of famine and distress, which even the most ardent Protectionists of the time were quite unable to gainsay or withstand, but which happily now no longer exists, I ask whether that grave moment of reflection and self-examination has not now arrived when it behoves all classes who feel themselves sen-

sibly affected, to pause and seriously review the present position; and if a false step has been made, as many think, to have the courage and the energy to retrace it without delay. This is neither more nor less than what a prudent man in private, or a prudent trader in commercial life, would find it his imperative interest to do. How much more imperative, therefore, is it when Imperial and patriotic interests are so heavily involved!

We have tried free trade, and it has been found wanting. We have done our best to impress other countries with the reasonableness of our policy, and in return they scoff at our blindness, and turn a deaf ear to our remonstrances. In the meantime, partial ruin and wholesale depression and distress are staring us in the face. Our local burdens are increasing, our exports diminishing. Our working classes, unsettled, are waging open war in the cause of labor against capital; discontented, because unable to find the real cause of their discontent; clamoring for their participation in profits, which can hardly be said to exist, and yet unable to account for the hesitation and inability of their employers to accede to what they consider are only their just demands.

Why should we persist in such an Utopian crusade? Why have we cut adrift from our old anchorage to launch our good ship upon a treacherous torrent, which is hurling us helplessly to imminent shipwreck? In Heaven's name, if we are on the wrong tack, let us arrest our downward course. Don't let us, for the sake of a Quixotic theory, blind our eyes to the fact that our trade is ruinously slipping from us, and that we are sacrificing our best and dearest interests to an unacceptable idea.

There are indications that the tide of public opinion is undergoing a gradual and, therefore, a more convincing change. I hail it with satisfaction. After all, the argument that comes home to every one's pocket is the most cogent, and is worth all the theories and all the lectures of all the political economists in the world.

I appeal to the common sense and to the patriotism of my countrymen, and if they are convinced how great has been the fallacy of our free trade policy without reciprocity, it is for them to say, as I believe sincerely they will say, whether a return to a policy of limited protection, so far from being impossible or undesirable, is not the true and simple solution of our present difficulties, and will tend, in a more simple and natural way than any other, to retrieve our losses, increase our revenue, lighten our burdens, bring peace, contentment, and employment to our working classes, and teach them and us to bless the day which restored the old policy and the old watchword of "Protection to native British industry." With the object of bringing these views before the public, and of inviting their discussion and consideration, I have ventured to address you.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient, humble Servant,

BATEMAN.

Shobdon Court, Leominster, Herefordshire.

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